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SUBJECT: U.S. SPEAKER IMAM DR. TALAL EID PROMOTES INTERFAITH
DIALOGUE AND DISCUSSES ISLAM IN AMERICA

¶1. (U) Summary: U.S. Speaker and native Arabic speaker Imam Dr. Talal Eid's September 7-9 visit to Kuwait during the month of Ramadan broke new ground and cultivated goodwill amongst ultra-conservative female audiences, Kuwait Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs officials, and students from a wide spectrum of social and economic backgrounds. Imam Dr. Talal Eid stressed the importance of moderation, tolerance and co-existence. His program directly addressed the MSP goals of supporting democracy, preventing extremist ideology and understanding American society and values. End summary.

¶2. (U) Dr. Talal Eid, a distinguished scholar, founder and executive director of the Islamic Institute of Boston, chaplain at Brandeis University and at Massachusetts General Hospital of Boston, Adjunct Professor of Arts of Ministry at Hartford Seminary and Commissioner at the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, began his visit with a well-attended speech to a group of Muslim scholars and officials from the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs. The presentation, which focused on the current state of Muslims in America, was organized by the Western Perception of Islam Center at the Kuwait Grand Mosque. Dr. Eid offered examples of his own positive co-existence as a Muslim with his non-Muslim neighbors, colleagues and friends. He stressed that Muslims are encouraged to respect all three religions, Islam, Christianity and Judaism, as they all are based on the same universal values.

¶3. (U) The audience's questions revolved around President Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East and the current status of freedoms enjoyed by minorities under the Obama administration. Dr. Eid noted that despite invisible barriers between Muslims and non-Muslims in the U.S., non-Muslims are eager to learn more about Islam and the Arabic language. Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies have become increasingly popular and are taught at major American universities. This is a golden opportunity, he stressed, for Arabs and Muslims in America to build new bridges with non-Muslims and non-Arabs and with one another. He also encouraged Kuwaitis to open inter-faith dialogue with fellow Muslims from the Sunni and Shiite faiths to foster peace and stability in the region.

¶4. (U) Imam Dr. Talal Eid also delivered a speech, attended by the Ambassador, to a mixed group of 50 Muslims and non-Muslims at the Aware Dialogue Center, before joining them for a traditional Iftar hosted by Dr. Ibrahim Adsani, a recent IVLP grantee on Interfaith Dialogue. When asked about the Arab-Israeli conflict, Dr. Eid encouraged Arabs to live in peace and share the land. He noted that Arabs, Jews and Christians had been able to coexist peacefully in the past.

¶5. (U) Imam Dr. Talal Eid addressed a group of sixty conservative women who supervise the Islamic Studies and Quran Recitation Centers, administered by the Islamic Studies Division at the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, in cooperation with the Islamic Cultural Center. The women were fully covered in black "Abayas" and "Niqabs" (full face cover). One of the attendees noted that it was an eye-opener for her to meet an Arab-American Imam and scholar for the first time. Through this program, the U.S. Embassy has broken new ground and obtained rare access to an

ultra-conservative women's group.

¶6. (U) Imam Dr. Talal Eid addressed a group of students from different socio-economic backgrounds and genders at a presentation organized by the American Corner at the Gulf University for Sciences and Technology. He noted that Muslim students at American universities are free to observe Ramadan and religious holidays. He added that as a Muslim Chaplain, he has a special budget from Brandeis University to allow his students to enjoy a traditional Iftar on campus. While agreeing with one student that the U.S. is not a perfect society, Dr. Eid stressed that it is self-correcting one, in which Americans are willing to learn lessons from past mistakes and alter their behavior, views and laws accordingly. He encouraged the students to open dialogue and share ideas and opinions with one another and with people of other cultures.

¶7. (U) The Embassy press section arranged an exclusive recorded interview for Imam Dr. Talal Eid on privately-owned, conservative ALWATAN TV. It is expected to air soon as a special segment on "Islam in America," in the framework of one of the top programs in Kuwait, "Taw Eleil." Imam Dr. Talal Eid explained that the purpose of his visit was to promote interfaith dialogue and to highlight the generally strong relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims in America. He discussed Islam in America, underscoring the importance of tolerance and moderation to prevent extremist ideologies. Imam Dr. Talal Eid concluded his interview by stressing the importance of co-existence between Sunnis and Shiites not only in Kuwait but all around the world.

¶8. (U) Post would like to thank Michael Bandler and his IIP colleagues for identifying and arranging the visit of Imam Dr. Talal Eid, a distinguished American-Muslim scholar and an excellent

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speaker on Islam in America and on interfaith dialogue. We hope to see him again in Kuwait and recommend him highly for other posts.
JONES